

International Environmental Systems Update

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Wisc. Governor Signs Historic EMS Agreement With Bavaria

Wisconsin Gov. Tommy G. Thompson and Bavarian Environmental Minister Werner Schnappauf have joined their states in an historic regulatory reform working partnership that emphasizes environmental management systems (EMSs).

The innovative agreement was signed Dec. 1 in Munich, Germany, as part of a trade mission that included a visit to a BMW research center and a Thompson speech on transatlantic cooperation to the Herbert Quandt Stiftung Foundation.

Under the agreement, Bavarian and Wisconsin businesses, governments and community interests will commit to innovation to benefit their joint "ecological and economic futures." The agreement says some of the states' future needs are such that "the command-and-control regulatory systems is unlikely to meet [them]

The 10-point agreement emphasizes testing management systems that can achieve "verified environmental results" better than the present regulatory system. Participating organizations now will be eligible for "joint verification" to ISO 14000 and Europe's Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) "according to the principles of performance audits and legal compliance."

"The Working Partnership's goal shall be to reach a sustaining economic and environmental system in our states and beyond our states by way of self-responsibility of all parties," the agreement says.

In addition to joint EMS verification tasks in the agreement include:

- Exploration of electronic data processing as a means of managing EMS information and monitoring EMS progress;
- joint research on innovations through the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Bavarian universities, focusing on engineering, technology, environmental management and new regulatory systems;
- Development of an international law project in cooperation with the International Environmental Lawyers Network and other partners;
- Exploration of easier ways for small business to achieve environmental performance goals;
- Formation of municipal and business sector partnerships to achieve environmental performance while saving regulatory costs;
- Development of innovative environmental public policies and laws through academic and professional associations; and
- People to people exchanges to share "best practices that protect the environment, enhance the economy and promote good government."

Historical Environmental Leadership

The two states are known as innovation leaders with environmental initiatives. Bavaria's program of "regulatory substitution" through the "Environmental Pact of Bavaria" has received widespread attention. Wisconsin has a Cooperative Environmental Agreement Law that was proposed by Thompson to test regulatory innovation. Wisconsin is the only state with a comprehensive innovation agreement being considered by EPA under its agreement with the Environmental Council of States.

"The world wants better ways to protect the environment at a time when the government resources are increasingly limited but trade's potential is not," Thompson said.

Thompson said the agreement "will prove it makes greater sense to adopt an integrated, systems approach to environmental protection than the piecemeal approach of the past."

Schnappauf said Bavaria "believes that the goals of ecological protection and economic progress can only be accomplished by joining forces. Economic development at the expense of nature is not possible in the long term, but environmental protection at the expense of industry robs it of its economic, technical and human resources."

Modern environmental protection, he continued, "cannot be rigidly confined in the system of command and control. Adherence to the law... is the necessary foundation. But future-oriented environmental protection needs more. It must rely on industry taking the initiative and assuming direct responsibility."

Schnappauf applauded the European Union's EMAS and said Bavaria is a pioneer in its implementation. One of every six EMAS verified firms in Europe is in Bavaria. He said the proposed EMAS revisions bring it into closer alignment with ISO 14001.

Wisconsin Natural Resources Secretary George Meyer will organize Wisconsin's implementation of the agreement. Meyer is considered a national leader in regulatory reform thinking, working within ECOS and appearing on Capitol Hill to advocate environmental initiatives. He also is a strong supporter of a systems approach to management.

The Wisconsin DNR is assembling a team to work with businesses, communities and government agencies in a way that "spreads the benefits of this initiative throughout the state," Meyer said.

Meyer said the agreement was well timed because "the worlds of business and regulation are changing simultaneously."

"States can seize the moment or fall behind in promoting commerce and environmental quality together," he declared.

Meyer continued, "This agreement is exceptional because it joins two great states that share rich cultural traditions and recognize our combined accomplishments in manufacturing, good government and quality education."

In his remarks to the Quandt Foundation, Thompson said the agreement had potential to reach far beyond the two states.

"Bavaria and Wisconsin can change the world because they are small enough to manage and large enough to matter," he said. "An idea that is shared at the right time, and with the right people, can change the world. This is what happened with welfare reform, which began in Wisconsin. The principle behind our agreement is simple: Think ecologically and act economically."

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